

Obituary

OBITUARY.



JOSEPH WARREN FREER, M. D., President and Professor of Physiology and Microscopic Anatomy, in Rush Medical College, died, at his residence in Chicago, April 12th, 1877.

He was born at Fort Ann, Washington Co., N. Y., on the 10th of July, 1816.

His father, Elias Freer, was of Hollandish descent, the ancestry being among the early Dutch settlers on the Hudson. His mother was of the Paine family—early settlers of New England. Both families have numerous representatives in the West, including many well-known and estimable citizens. His educational advantages were those of the common school, until fifteen years of age, after which he attended for two years what was then termed a High School. At eighteen he entered the office of Dr. Lemuel C. Paine, then of Clyde, N. Y., as a pupil of medicine, and, in order to pay his way, attended the doctor's small drug store. During this period, he took a course of three months instructions in the French language, but the teaching being furnished by a New England lady, he afterwards found that he had scarcely become *au fait* in pronunciation.

In his nineteenth year, June 14th, 1836, he came to Chicago, where for a few weeks he was employed as a clerk in a dry goods store; then being seized with the prevailing anxiety to acquire land, he invested in a "mud claim" on Calumet river, about four miles from any neighbors, except Pottawatomie Indians. He remained there about two months, and, in the meantime, nearly died of filth, bad food, and ultimate sickness. During the latter he became unconscious, and in this condition

he was carried back to Chicago, and received into the residence of Mr. John Dye, then standing on the corner of State and Clark streets. In the fall of the same year, his parents having immigrated West, he concluded to follow their fortunes. They settled on "claim land," at a place called Forked Creek, near Wilmington, Ill. There he remained until July 4th, 1846. During this time he formed several valuable acquaintances, particularly Hon. Richard L. Wilson, formerly editor of the Chicago *Evening Journal*, and Dr. Hiram Todd, to the latter of whom he was ever grateful for valuable advice, and the use of his excellent literary and scientific library. In later years he often spoke of Dr. Todd in affectionate terms, characterizing him as "a gentleman of the old school, of liberal education and culture."

Aside from incidental advantages of this sort, he had little opportunity to educate himself, for with the earlier settlers the material man demanded more than the moral or mental. Nevertheless, he did burn some midnight oil over a little Dublin Dissector, an ancient work on chemistry and sundry literary works, borrowed from his cherished friend, Dr. Todd. While sojourning in this region, he opened, and brought under cultivation, three farms, on one of which he made his home after his first marriage. This is now one of the finest farms in the Kankakee valley. There are trees on it, of his own planting, now nearly two feet in diameter.

In March, 1844, he married Emeline, daughter of Phineas Holden, Esq., of Hickory Creek, Will Co. One child, Henry C., was the fruit of this union. He is now living, and won honor as a soldier in the late war. Mrs. Freer died in the autumn of 1845—a little less than two years from their marriage.

This bereavement changed the whole course of his subsequent life. It happened that he was dissatisfied with the medical treatment of her last sickness, and expressed a determination to know whether there was any truth in, and reliance to be placed upon medicine. In furtherance of this purpose, mounting a load of wheat, that he might not lose any time, he drove

to the then *village* of Chicago, to solicit Prof. Daniel Brainard to receive him into his office. By a singular coincidence, he was met at the door by Ephraim Ingals, then a student, and afterwards for a number of years his colleague in Rush Medical College. It is sufficient here to say, that then commenced a friendship which continued throughout Prof. Freer's life, and was feelingly, as well as eloquently, commemorated by the survivor at the funeral exercises.

Notwithstanding the somewhat rustic appearance of the applicant, Dr. Brainard gave him a hearty welcome to his office, where he continued as a student until his graduation at Rush Medical College at the close of the session 1848-9.

As sagacious an observer as Dr. Brainard could not, and did not, fail to mark in this new student an ability and determination, combined with a zeal and untiring industry, which were sure to result most honorably. From first to last he was invited to assist in all of Prof. Brainard's important operations, and during the last years of his pupilage was frequently sent to perform such as he could not attend. The warm friendship and confidence thus commenced, ceased only with the life of that great surgeon and teacher.

The last winter of his pupilage, Dr. Freer was appointed acting Demonstrator of Anatomy by Prof. Wm. B. Herrick, then professor of that department. After graduation he contracted a copartnership with Dr. John A. Kennicott, of Wheeling, Cook county, in whose genial society he passed some of the pleasantest hours of his life.

In June, 1849, he married Miss Katherine Gatter, of Wurtemberg, Germany. In a private note addressed to the writer of this notice, he says: "Our union has been a happy and prosperous one, and in fact I believe I owe much of my success in life to my wife." A daughter and three sons were the fruit of this marriage, all of whom are now living. The eldest, Frederick W. Freer, is a rising young artist of Chicago.

In the spring of 1850, he received by *concours* the regular appointment of Demonstrator of Anatomy in Rush Medical College, a high honor, as the place was very ably contested for,

among others, by the late distinguished Prof. E. S. Cooper, of San Francisco, California. From this time he gave a part of Prof. Herrick's course, comprising the descriptive anatomy of the bones and muscles, and during Prof. Herrick's absence in Europe, he gave the entire course.

In the summer of 1855, he was appointed Professor of Descriptive Anatomy.

His duties from the time of his appointment, in 1850, to his final sickness, demanded and received great activity, both of mind and body. Whilst Prof. Brainard occupied the position of Surgeon of the U. S. Marine Hospital, Prof. Freer was his constant and invaluable deputy.

It was at a clinical lecture given by Prof. Freer, at the old Marine Hospital that the writer first met and formed his acquaintance. He was forcibly impressed then by Dr. Freer's anxiety for accuracy in diagnosis, rationality in therapeutics, and perspicuity in conveying his ideas to his pupils. An intimacy of nearly a quarter of a century has strengthened the conviction then entertained, that these were strong points in his professional character.

On the re-organization of Rush Medical College in 1859, Prof. Freer was transferred to the chair of Physiology and Microscopic Anatomy, a position he occupied up to the time of his decease.

Prof. Blaney retiring from the college in 1872, Prof. Freer was elected to the Presidency.

Aside from his connection with the college, he has filled many important positions. He was formerly, for several years, one of the medical staff of Mercy Hospital, and since the re-opening of Cook County Hospital, soon after the close of the war, was appointed one of the Medical Board, which position was only vacated by his death. He was also consulting surgeon of St. Joseph's Hospital, of the Hospital for Women of the State of Illinois, and many other public charities.

Prof. Freer was appointed Brigade Surgeon very soon after the breaking out of the war, but after having served some three or four months, was obliged to resign in consequence of ill health.

In 1864, he was appointed U. S. Enrolling Surgeon for the Chicago District. In the discharge of the duties of this position, he gave great offence to several irregular practitioners by refusing to receive as authoritative their certificates of disability. They thereupon, through a "committee," preferred charges against Surgeon Freer, addressed to Brig. Gen. Jas. B. Fry, Provost Marshal General at Washington. On the basis of these charges, a Court of Investigation was ordered, and great popular professional interest was excited as to the result.

The trial ended in a complete discomfiture of the complainants, and largely increased confidence in Surgeon Freer, both by the Government and the community. [Vid. *Chicago Medical Journal*, March, 1865.]

In 1867, Prof. Freer sent his family to Europe, following them a few months after. They remained until 1871, and he, returning each year to give his course of lectures in the college, spent the remaining months in Europe. He traveled through the British islands, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, visiting all the principal cities and points of interest, taking ample time for observation. He attended the Medical Congress in Paris during the Exposition of 1867, and afterwards spent a considerable period in visiting their hospitals and medical schools.

So also he visited the most celebrated schools of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1868, and he had reason to be pleased at the consideration and courtesy extended by many of their most eminent professional men. On this tour he exhibited to Prof. Bennet, of Edinburgh, and others, his discovery of the structure of the blood corpuscle, by means of direct light, using a Wales Illuminator which he carried with him.

In 1870, he spent four months in Vienna, familiarizing himself with its great hospitals.

His last voyage was in 1871, when, after a trip to Italy extending as far south as Naples, and a few months in the Tyrol and Munich, which latter had been the family's place of residence since 1868, he returned home in September, bringing them with him.

On his several visits to Europe, he had secured many articles, not only adapted to adorn his home, but of rare scientific and professional interest. These and other souvenirs, of his residence and tenements which had afforded him means to indulge his tastes for study and travel, and which, earned by industry and economy, he had a well-won right to look forward to as affording ease and comfort in his declining years, in that terrible night of October, a few short weeks only after his return, were swept away in the general conflagration—himself and family barely escaping with their lives.

Younger men than Dr. Freer, might have given up in despair, but he in nowise disheartened, returned with energy to his practice, to the College and the hospitals.

Notwithstanding this terrible reverse, it is a source of unmingled satisfaction to know that at his death he left his family not rich, but comparatively free from debt and with a modest competence.

Although circumstances conspired to place Dr. Freer, as a teacher in the elementary department of Physiology, he was distinguished, not only popularly but professionally, both as a physician and surgeon.

The first eight or ten years of his professional life, his practice was devoted largely to surgery. He performed nearly all the operations of note from that for cataract by extraction, to excision of knee-joint and elbow-joint with entire ulna and head of radius, before Carnochan's case.

Perhaps he did not originate much in surgery, but he suggested and practiced several things of value. He is entitled to priority in suggestion of the use of collodion in erysipelas, burns, &c. So, also, the first publication of the use of adhesive plaster in fractures of the clavicle, a form of treatment the advantages of which are not even yet fully appreciated by the profession, is due to him.

However, it may be claimed for him that he was decidedly original in his application of the general principles of both branches of the profession. He always seemed to feel degraded when either operating or prescribing merely by rule.

From the time of his entrance upon the profession, to use his own language, he "worshipped nature as fervently as ever the Incas did the sun, and for this reason was never guilty of knowingly putting brakes on her wheels."

The highest eulogium that can be pronounced upon him is furnished by the record of his life. That shows that whatever he undertook to do, he sought to do in the best possible way. There was not a scintilla of sham or pretence in his nature, and he was a vigorous hater of both. What he could not tolerate in himself, that he could not overlook in others. Hence he was little loved by "irregulars," either outside or inside of the scientific pale, and was very frequently a target for their attacks. Commencing medical study when his life was a little more than half gone past, he commanded all his faculties by an indomitable will, to their uttermost of service. He was never idle, and in the height of active practice was never heard to say he had no time to read and investigate.

"Self-made men," it has been said, are liable to be saturated with vanity at the success achieved. But up to the hour he took his bed for his last sickness, Prof. Freer never boasted, or even wore for a moment the appearance of pride for what he had done, but rather, lamented the imperfection of the past, and laid out designs for harder work in the future.

Late in life he added largely to his juvenile knowledge of the French language, and became a proficient in the German.

What he knew, he knew thoroughly. His exact anatomical knowledge made him a safe operator, whilst his sound judgment made him a successful physician.

Physiological study and experimentation led him, more and more, to distrust the reported results of many experiments, instituted and commented on by men whose names have a certain repute in the scientific world, and he was not satisfied until, personally, he had confirmed or confuted them. No "authority" but Nature would content him. A zealous student in this department, he did not shrink from the conclusions to which physiological research led. His practice as

a physician was thoroughly pervaded by it. Coming somewhat slowly to a diagnosis, and perhaps more slowly still to the therapeutics, every one who has met him in the clinic or in consultation, will remember, with highest respect, the solidity of the reasons he was able and willing to give for the opinion and the action. As a medical teacher, the same qualities of mind were manifest. Not fluent of speech, yet his language was always accurate and well chosen. Not devoid of a certain dry humor, he rarely indulged, while lecturing, in anything beyond a clear and correct statement of matters of fact. New students, and superficial older ones, did not fully recognize his worth, but those more advanced, and who came to the College solely to acquire knowledge, yielded him close attention, and learned to honor and venerate him as one who was master of the subject, was anxious to impart real instruction, and speaking, spoke as one having authority.

As an experimenter, Prof. Freer was eminently "at home." He was remarkably successful. Here his knowledge of both human and comparative anatomy shone forth. The diversities of organization which too many vivisectors greatly disregard, always received due consideration, and, as usual with him, he came to no generalizations with undue haste. His untimely demise has prevented publication to the world of many discoveries of great value, that now are only to be gathered up from the note-books and memories of his pupils and intimates.

As a citizen he was patriotic and public spirited. Shrinking from mere notoriety, he was, nevertheless, widely known and generally beloved, and his loss is mourned by very many who have been the grateful recipients of his solid but unostentatious beneficence. His private life was ever stainless, and in all his relations, whether with individuals or the public, he was irreproachable. By his colleagues in the faculty, and by his friends he was earnestly beloved, and he reciprocated their attachment with all the warmth of his kindly heart.

The grief of his family and immediate friends, if capable of any amelioration, may find it in the thought that, not only the profession of his choice, but the entire community have

shown themselves anxious to pay just tributes to his worth, and embalm his memory in heartfelt homage.

Dr. Allen also read a paper containing a statement of Dr. Freer's last illness, and the autopsy, as follows:

Dr. Freer's sickness commenced during the last week of Feb., the primary symptoms being those commonly observed during the onset of a severe cold, aggravated by a profuse laryngeal and post-nasal catarrh of an unusually distressing character. This was speedily followed by intense paroxysmal pain in right frontal and right lateral regions of head. At first these paroxysms were of short duration, but became gradually more prolonged until the 8th of March, when the pain, though less severe, continued during the day and night, after which it did not return.

March 9th, soon after the cessation of pain, vomiting commenced, and continued, with irregular intervals of from three to six hours, accompanied by intolerable burning sensations in epigastric region, until March 29th, when it suddenly ceased.

March 11th. Divergent strabismus of the right eye, with slight dilation of pupil. These continued more or less marked until death.

From March 9th until 29th, there was evidence of great depression of the nerve centres. The pulse varied from 58 to 70 per minute until the 20th, when it became more frequent and variable, at times being too irregular to count. Respiration during sleep fell to 5-7-8, and was rarely 12 per minute; while awake it varied as the mind was acted upon. During this period there was marked jaundice. The urine was loaded with bile and of a high specific gravity—the bowels persistently constipated. The vomit contained large quantities of changed bile and broken down blood. Temperature varied slightly from normal. The mind active, feeble and confused at times, until from the 22d to the 29th there was constant delirium with periods of wild hallucination.

On the 28th, an erysipelatous blush appeared upon the scalp and advanced over the forehead, finally involving both sides of the face and head. Simultaneously with this, the vomiting ceased, the mind cleared, the general symptoms improved, food

was taken in considerable quantities, and hope of recovery was entertained.

On the 7th of April there was a general relapse—the vomiting returned, the respirations slow and at times labored, the pulse irregular, the mind feeble and wandering. The power of life failed rapidly until the 12th of April, at 5 o'clock P. M., when he passed quietly away.

AUTOPSY.

The autopsy made on the 13th of April by Drs. Bogue and Wadsworth, in the presence of members of the Faculty of Rush Medical College, showed the cause of death to have been meningitis, the basilar portion of the brain having been the seat of the greatest amount of inflammation.

The heart and lungs, stomach, duodenum, liver and kidneys being normal.

A critical examination of the brain, made by Drs. Danforth and Wadsworth, is reported as follows; to wit, weight of brain 53 oz.

The dura mater thickened and opaque, with extensive adhesions in front and over the superior or convex portion of cerebrum. Falciiform process ossified.

An extensive exudation of gelatinous material was found covering the hemispheres.

The pia mater and arachnoid were not changed.

Transverse sections of the cerebral lobes were made from above downward to the base of the brain, but no abnormal appearances were found.

The sulci between the cerebral convolutions were very deep and complicated; and the limit between the white and gray matter was strongly pronounced.

The posteria cornua of the right lateral ventricle was wanting. The cornua of the left lateral ventricle was filled with bloody serum.

The base of the brain presented marked indications of recent inflammation. The third ventricle was distended by plastic lymph, which contained a vast number of protoplasmic bodies. The basilar arteries were half filled by soft yellow clots, which must have been some days in forming.